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ROALD AMUNDSEN AND THE SOUTH POLE

Once in a generation of men some pioneer writes a story of adventures in the uttermost places that thrills the world and remains a classic for all time to come. Such was Edward Whymper's *Scrambles Among the Alps*, the story of his conquest of the Matterhorn. Such was Stanley's *How I Found Livingston*, or Captain Cook's *Voyages of Discovery*. These became at once thrilling tales for children about the fireside, guide-books for the amateur and style-books for the writer of travels. In Roald Amundsen's book *The South Pole*,¹ we have a work that must undoubtedly become a similar classic. Forty years will improve its flavor, but will not dim its charm or usefulness.

This unique book gives a very detailed account of the successful Norwegian Antarctic expedition. It begins with a thirteen-page résumé of the voyage, entitled "The First Account", which presumably was the story as first given to the press March 8, 1912. Following this comes an introduction by Fridtjof Nansen. Volume I contains an account of the preparations and the voyage to southern waters. Volume II begins with the start for the Pole from the winter quarters and gives in great detail the story of the final triumph. Then follows an account of the return to civilization. The five appendices contain a description of the "Fram", meteorological observations, including the aurora australis, geologic observations, astronomic observations, and oceanography. There are several fine maps and charts and 136 excellent photographs.

The book is written in quaint and charming style, with a delicate humor that delights us at every page. Not a little of its effectiveness in English must be due to the skill of the translator.

Nansen's introduction is a pleasant tribute to Roald Amundsen. It reviews his career, beginning with his first voyage when he sailed in the "Gjøa" with the double object of discovering the magnetic North Pole and making the northwest passage. It tells

¹ *The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition in the "Fram", 1910-1912*, by Roald Amundsen. Translated from the Norwegian by A. G. Chater. 2 vols. London: John Murray; New York: Lee Keedick. 1913.

how he sailed his little yacht over the whole arctic region round the north of America, through the course that had been sought for four hundred years. And yet, so Nansen tells us, even with such a record, he had a long struggle to complete the equipment for his new expedition. Outside of a few friends, little interest was shown in him or his work, and he himself gave everything he possessed in the world :—

“Loaded with anxieties and debts, . . . he sailed out quietly on a summer night.” Then he was forgotten. As Nansen continues: “Everyone went on with his own affairs. The mists were upon us day after day, week after week, . . . the mists that are kind to little men and swallow up all that is great and towers above them. Suddenly a bright spring day cuts through the bank of fog. There is a new message. People stop again and look up. *High above them shines a deed, a man.* A wave of joy runs through the souls of men; their eyes are bright as the flags that wave about them.

“Why? On account of the great geographical discoveries, the important scientific results? Oh no; that will come later for the few specialists. This is something all can understand. A victory of human mind and human strength over the dominion and powers of nature; a deed that lifts us above the grey monotony of daily life; a view over shining plains, with lofty mountains against the cold blue sky, and lands covered by ice-sheets of inconceivable extent; a vision of long-vanished glacial times; the triumph of the living over the stiffened realm of death. There is a ring of steeled, purposeful human will—through icy frosts, snow-storms, and death.

“For the victory is not due to the great inventions of the present day and the many new appliances of every kind. The means used are of immense antiquity, the same as were known to the nomad thousands of years ago, when he pushed forward across the snow-covered plains of Siberia and Northern Europe. But *everything*, great and small was thoroughly thought out, and the plan was splendidly executed. It is the *man* that matters, here as everywhere. Like everything great, it all looks so plain and simple. Of course, that is just as it had to be, we think.”

This we quote for the benefit of those utilitarian philosophers who see no earthly use in polar explorations anyhow.

Amundsen's account begins with the story of the numerous explorations of the southern seas, beginning with Prince Henry of Portugal, who crossed the equator in 1470, down through the notable voyages of da Gama, Vespucci, Magellan, Drake, Captain Cook, to whom Amundsen pays a great tribute, Dumont, D'Urville, Wilkes, the American sent out by Congress in 1838, and Admiral Ross, who went in 1841 through the ice pack into the open Antarctic Sea in two little boats that were regular tubs. Ross opened up the way by which the Pole was finally reached.

Amundsen was a member of the Belgian expedition under Gerlache, which set out in 1897. We quote the following passages about another member of the Gerlache expedition who came later to a manner of celebrity :—

“Frederick A. Cook, of Brooklyn,” says Amundsen, “was surgeon to the expedition—beloved and respected by all. As a medical man, his calm and convincing presence had an excellent effect. As things turned out, the greatest responsibility fell upon Cook, but he mastered the situation in a wonderful way. Through his practical qualities he became finally indispensable. It cannot be denied that the Belgian Antarctic expedition owes a great debt to Cook. . . .

“Afterwards sickness appeared, and threatened the most serious danger to the expedition—scurvy and insanity. Scurvy especially increased, and did such havoc that finally there was not a single man who escaped being attacked by this fearful disease.

“Cook's behavior at this time won the respect and devotion of all. It is not too much to say that Cook was the most popular man of the expedition, and he deserved it. From morning to night he was occupied with his many patients, and when the sun returned it happened not infrequently that, after a strenuous day's work, the doctor sacrificed his night's sleep to go hunting for seals and penguins, in order to provide the fresh meat that was so greatly needed by all.”

When midsummer failed to release the ship from the ice, it was Cook who devised an ingenious method of sawing her out, thus enabling her to reach the open lead.

“Cook was incontestably the leading spirit in this work, and gained such honor among the members of the expedition

that I think it is just to mention it. Upright, honorable, capable, and conscientious in the extreme—such is the memory we retain of Frederick A. Cook from those days.

“Little did his comrades suspect that a few years later he would be regarded as one of the greatest humbugs the world has ever seen. This is a psychological enigma well worth studying for those who care to do so.”

This part of the book closes with a great tribute to Captain Scott and Lieutenant Ernest Shackleton.

“The North Pole is reached!” This dispatch in September, 1909, wrought a great change in the plans of Amundsen. It found him in the midst of the preparation for the exploration of the north polar basin. Here was a most unpleasant predicament. The North Pole question was solved, and he felt that under the spell of Peary’s deed his own expedition, though its chief purpose had been all along scientific, and not for record-breaking, might go to pieces. Under the circumstances he felt that there was nothing to do but attack the last great problem, the South Pole. If he could solve that, he could raise as much money as he wanted for later ventures in the North. He decided to keep his new purpose entirely secret, and went on with the plans for the expedition, ostensibly to go to northern waters. He felt that his friends would not criticize him in this course, and he did not care particularly what his enemies said. He had gone too far to retreat, and lose what had already been expended.

The explorer decided to avoid completely every route that had already been followed, or might be followed by the English, German, and Japanese expeditions that were then under way. The following was the plan to which he consistently adhered: (1) Depart from Norway not later than the middle of August, 1910. (2) Call at the Madeira Islands. (3) Sail to the south of Cape of Good Hope and Australia. (4) Push through ice pack into Ross Sea about New Year, 1911. (5) Take as base of operations the Bay of Whales in the great Antarctic Barrier, reaching there about January 15. (6) Winter on the Barrier in ‘summer’ of 1911 and strike for the Pole about October, 1911.

This whole plan was worked out by Amundsen at his home near Christiania in September, 1909, and was carried out to the

last detail. The final sentence of his plan was: "Thus we shall be back from the polar journey on January 25th." It was on January 25, 1912, that he returned to winter quarters after his successful journey to the Pole.

Herein lies the great reason for Amundsen's success. His whole expedition was planned with such utmost care. It was he who oversaw all arrangements. The provisions were chosen under his personal care, the dogs, the tools, the instruments, the clothing, the sledges, and the skis.

The loyal citizens of Norway contributed great numbers of presents in the way of food, clothing, wine, medical supplies, etc. Yet the one great thing they lacked was money. They were from the beginning on a very small budget.

Amundsen was aided by many new inventions. Thus he had an oil-motor for his ship, a modern lighting system, presumably acetylene, a modern petroleum heating system for winter quarters, a ready-built house, a gramophone for amusement, and electrical apparatus. Amundsen goes into great detail in his description of the provisioning. His book is thus a most valuable guide for explorers.

It is evident that the preparedness of the expedition was the reason of its success. Modern invention helped to enliven the burden of the long southern winter. It made the machinery work more smoothly. But it is also evident as we turn the pages of the history that the genius of the chief was after all the great element of success. The chief was a great executive, and withal a wonderful optimist.

One of the most interesting things is the explorer's story of how they accommodated the dogs on board ship. They kept their ninety-seven arctic dogs all on deck, building a false floor entirely over the ship's deck and about three inches above it. This floor was removable, allowing cleaning and ventilation. Crossing the tropics it was shaded all over. Thus, Amundsen carried his thick-haired eskimos straight across the tropics without losing any of them; in fact, their numbers were considerably increased in the course of nature!

Amundsen shows extraordinary affection for his dogs. He was compelled to kill many during his final dash to the Pole, and

nothing gave him greater grief. One bad habit, he says, into which these eskimo dogs have fallen during the course of ages is their tendency to hold howling concerts. He was never able to make out the real meaning of these performances. The whole pack might be lying perfectly still and quiet on deck when a single individual would take upon himself the part of leader of the chorus and set up a long, blood-curdling yowl. Then the whole pack joined in and this infernal din went on at full steam for several minutes. This was calculated to tear the soundest sleeper from his slumbers. The only amusing thing about it was the conclusion. They all stopped short at the same instant, just as a well-trained chorus obeys the baton of its director.

On June 7, 1910, the expedition left Norway. I have not mentioned one important omen—the ship was the “Fram”, the sturdy boat in which Nansen reached his farthest north. The Norwegian Storting had lent the boat and had donated about \$20,000 for repairs and alterations.

It was not until the Madeira Islands were reached that Amundsen acquainted his fellows with his plans. Only the captain of the vessel had known of them heretofore. Up to this time the men had understood that they were bound for northern waters after rounding Cape Horn. Without exception they all declared instantly for the South Pole.

Now comes the long and tedious voyage of 16,000 miles around the Cape of Good Hope into the seas south of Australia. But there was no time for idleness. Every hour of the day was put in on preparations for the final expedition. Each man in the crew was a specialist. They were picked men chosen for their all-round qualities. Some of those who did menial tasks were highly educated.

It was on January 14, 1911, that the “Fram” arrived at the Ross Barrier, long considered one of the most mysterious natural phenomena of the earth. Here they moored in the vast Bay of Whales in latitude 79 S. Amundsen’s descriptions of the great white ice barrier are magnificent.

They spent many days in putting up the house, the parts of which had already been labeled and numbered, in training the dogs, some of which were green hands, killing seals, and trans-

porting the provisions from the "Fram" into their winter quarters. Their house was admirably constructed for winter quarters. It consisted of one large room and a kitchen. Before winter came on they built pent-houses along the sides and thus secured a great deal of room. They also made caverns in the ice around the house.

On February 4, 1911, they received a visit from the "Terra Nova", Captain Scott's vessel. Scott was not on board, but they got news of him and his work in exploring King Edward VII Land.

On February 10, Amundsen set forth on what he calls his depot journey. He placed large depots of provisions in succession at latitudes 80, 81, 82, 83, 84 S. These depots were quite solidly constructed of ice, about twelve feet in height, and were filled with cases of provisions. They were marked for several miles on each side with bamboo poles, flags, etc., so that any one might be easily found. The placing of these caches took up several weeks of hard work. Amundsen did not fail to put a great deal of seal-meat in the depots and this gave him fresh meat on the final journey to and from the Pole.

As soon as these depots were placed it was time to go into winter quarters, remembering that June, July, and August constitute winter in the southern hemisphere. The men passed this period in great comfort, in spite of such temperature as 76 degrees below zero.

The latter part of Volume I is devoted to the description of a day at Framheim. Rising early, it was the custom to reconnoitre briefly to note anything that had happened during the sleeping period. They all seem to have religiously brushed their teeth every morning, and to have bathed frequently, even using an American vapor-bath. Their breakfast consisted of hot American pan-cakes washed down with strong aromatic coffee. Some of the morning duties were taking the dogs out for exercise, working on their sledging outfit, digging passages in the ice, sewing leather clothing, packing and checking provisions for the dash to the Pole, washing clothes, dishes, etc.

Amundsen's attitude toward the use of alcoholic beverages in polar exploration is interesting. We expected to hear him

condemn it. Far from this, he considers "a tot of spirits" an excellent medicine in sub-zero emergencies. "The swilling of hot coffee," says he, "does not fill the bill." And he feels that his men needed it occasionally to keep up their cheer, and to patch up their indifferences. All of this is put in the quaintest manner.

It is hard for us to understand the long period of preparation that Amundsen thought necessary for the final dash to the Pole. We must remember that the weight of the outfit had to be reduced in every possible way and that everything taken with them must at the same time be absolutely trustworthy in character. Much of their clothing had to be remade; practically all shoes had to be expanded, as they were too small for feet with three pairs of stockings. Again, it would have been absolute folly to start until spring and milder temperature were certain.

Amundsen and his party got away for the Pole on October 19, 1911. There were five in the party, Hanssen, Wisting, Hassel, Bjaaland, and himself. They had four sledges with thirteen dogs to each. At the start the sledges were very light, as they took only supplies for the trip to 80 S., where their cases were awaiting them. Their departure from Framheim was, of course, a great event. All the crew turned out to see them depart and one man photographed them with a cinematograph. These films have been used by Amundsen in his lectures in America.

The first day they made seventeen miles. They turned loose a fine dog, Neptune, because he was too fat, and another, Peary, because he was incapacitated. In the first four days they covered ninety-four miles. The sledges bore sledge metres which measured the distance covered very effectively.

After 80 S. they erected snow-beacons about six feet high every nine kilometres, or one hundred and fifty in all. These snow-beacons were invaluable guides to them on their return. From 80 to 84 S. they made an average of seventeen miles per day. Between 84 and 88 S. they sometimes made as much as twenty-three miles a day even in thick fog. Yet they were in constant danger of crevasses and had many narrow escapes. Travel was aided by their skis. They coasted rapidly many miles per day behind the sledges.

On this part of the journey they were constantly rising. At 84 S. they had reached a height of 4,550 feet. Soon they had arrived at the alpine height of 10,920 feet. In one day they made nineteen and one-fourth miles with an ascent of 5,750 feet. This extraordinary achievement shows what can be done with well-trained dogs.

It was at this point, $85^{\circ} 36'$, that they sacrificed twenty-four of their dogs. Amundsen almost weeps over his brave helpers. This slaughter was absolutely necessary. They had left behind the last depot at 84 S. They could not feed all these dogs, and, furthermore, the time had now come when they had to eat dog themselves. Some of them had declared they would not come to this, but when it came to the test, all had grown so weary of stale food, such as pemmican, biscuits, and chocolate, that they were eager for what Amundsen calls frankly dog cutlets. With the slaughtered dogs, they filled depot number eight. They now reduced the number of sledges to three.

We have to read Amundsen's narrative closely to appreciate the tremendous trial that they went through in these days. The explorer takes it all cheerfully and belittles the difficulties. Yet it is fearful when men are constantly falling from fatigue, when even dogs are dropping and dying because their lungs cannot take in enough air to nourish them, when noses and feet are freezing every few minutes, when one's face is covered with abscesses and great frost-sores of terrible appearance. Yet we do not get the same impression of physical suffering that we get from Peary's narrative.

It was in this vast plateau that on December 14, 1911, they attained the Pole. By dead reckoning their latitude was $89^{\circ} 53'$. When they caught the sun next day their calculation showed $89^{\circ} 56'$. In order to make sure that he had reached the Pole Amundsen encircled the camp with a radius of about twelve and one-half miles. That is, three men went out in three different directions, two at right angles to the course they had been steering and one in the same course. When their observations were later checked up in Norway by astronomers it was found that they could not have failed to come within a few hundred feet of the actual South Pole.

Amundsen found no new conditions at the Pole. It was the same vast plain of ice and snow. He remained there about three days in all, leaving on December 17th. He set up a little tent with a flag pole about thirteen feet high, well secured with guy-ropes on all sides. Inside he left letters addressed to the King of Norway and to Captain Scott who he assumed would be the first to find the tent. And it was so. The ill-fated Scott arrived there exactly one month later.

The remainder of Amundsen's history describes his meeting with members of the Japanese expedition—who impressed the Norwegians with nothing more than their fearful cruelty to seals—the return to civilization at Hobart, Australia, and the final breaking up of the party. I believe they did not lose a single man on the expedition.

The story of the discovery of the South Pole is followed by a description of the eastern sledge journey by Lieutenant Prestud, and a description of the voyage of the "Fram", while Amundsen was in winter quarters and on his way to the Pole, by Captain Nilsen.

The writer had the pleasure of meeting Roald Amundsen on June 25, 1913, at Portland, Maine. The explorer's visit was made a memorable celebration, as Portland is also the home of Rear Admiral Peary. A small, slight man of fifty-odd, wiry and alert in movement, with an unusually large nose, a genial smile, a deprecating manner, saying always "we". Such is the impression we get. Perhaps his personality will gain him far more applause than came to our American discoverer of the North Pole.

Amundsen will soon be far on his journey across the north polar basin. This he regards as his "main expedition". Starting from Behring Strait, Nansen so tells us, he will drift across the Pole with the movement of the ice. He will be five years in the ice and frost and darkness of the North. "It seems almost superhuman," says Nansen, "but he is the man for that, too. 'Fram' is his ship, 'forward' (fram) is his motto, and he will come through."

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